I

The Forest and Its People

174 The Kaingáng were forest nomads. For perhaps three hundred years that was the only life they knew, and they resented it. The forest was not their original home, for they were driven into it from their farms on the savannahs to the west by their enemies. They speak with nostalgia of the time long ago when they lived in little fenced villages and planted corn, beans and pumpkins. Before the pacification they had no villages and instead of dividing their time between cultivating their crops and hunting in the forest as they used to do, they wandered forever in the forest and planted no crops at all.

137 The forests of Santa Catarina are vast and mighty; they are rich and well watered, tall and gloomy. Saplings and trees six feet in diameter crowd close upon one another. Bushes cluster about the trees, and the whole is woven into one solid mass by the vines that hang from trees, twine about bushes, and creep along the ground. The forest everywhere grows right down to the edges of the rivers and looms on both sides like the walls of a great corridor, silent and lovely, impenetrable except with knife or club. Flocks of geese, taboo to the Indians, for those landlocked creatures may not touch these timid and agile waterfowl, skim above the surface of the rivers, and wherever a lichen-covered cliff rises from the river's edge it throws their calls echoing back and forth across the water.

133 I used to joke with the Brazilians telling them that their beautiful state
132 of Santa Catarina was not a land but a solution, for it is indeed a country of ten thousand water courses. Innumerable little streams undermine the earth, and during the rainy season in August and September, when it sometimes rains for a month without cease, when day after day thunder rolls about the mountain tops and the wind blows and the forest rocks until you

2: Henry E-5 (1932-1934) 1941
SM3 Caingang SM3
Awe'ikoma

imagine it is going to crash solidly on your head, these subterranean streams
cast great sections of the earth into the rivers. Then streams that were
sluggish and clear become turgid and rushing. Rivers that moved slowly
and whose bottoms you could easily see through their few feet of clear
water rise almost four feet overnight, and their purling shallows become
dangerous rapids, pouring tons of muddy red water down toward the sea.
Then all day long the shouts of the Indians—"Storm, go away, I am afraid
of you; so stop!"—go up among the camps, rising faintly above the roar of
the river, the rush of the rain, and the ceaseless rumble of the thunder.

Water is everywhere in Santa Catarina, and it literally grows on trees, or
at least in bamboo, the hollow stems of which are filled with it. You cannot
walk far without coming across at least a brook, and the Indians use the
streams as short cuts, sometimes walking in the water for half a mile. In
nine days a pair of rubber-soled tennis shoes rotted off my feet; by the end
of my five-weeks' hunting trip the seams of my waterproof leather boots
had rotted. Yet in this land where a hundred thousand terraces bear witness
to ages of slow erosion and the winding streams interlace like silver bands,
the Kaingáng are without boats or rafts. They have every other technique
for crossing a stream that ingenuity and resourcefulness might suggest:
they knock down a tree on one side of a stream so that it will fall on the
other and form a bridge, and they also build crude bridges. Men who have
supernatural power obtained from some water animal may even brave a
turbulent stream to carry a line across so that other people may pull them-
selves across on it. But before they came to Duque de Caxias the Kaingáng
knew nothing of navigation, and the one instance in folklore of an attempt
at it ended in a fiasco. Of course the Kaingáng were land nomads. It would
have been too much work to build a canoe or even a raft just to cross a
stream and it was much easier for them to wait until the river went down;
for the Kaingáng never felt a pressing need to be anywhere at any par-
ticular time. They might just as well have been on one side of the river as
on the other.

To know how to walk in the bed of a stream, stepping unerringly from
stone to slippery stone, is really a blessing, for a smarting body appreciates
the respite from thorns, and the coldness of the water is soothing to one's
battered and aching shins. The forest is no place for a pleasant stroll.
The gait of the forest rover is unmistakable, for he never just steps; he
places his feet. Where a thorn may prick, a vine slash, a fallen log batter;
where the earth may crumble underfoot or a snake strike from the concealment of a pile of leaves or a low bush overhanging the trail, every move
must be a maneuver. When an Indian is scratched or bruised, he stops and
removes the cause so that those who follow will not suffer as he did. He
gropes for the thorn until he finds it and then carries it far away to dispose

2: Henry E-S (1932-1934) 1941
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